



REMEMBER

- If a youth discloses to you, make time to process this for yourself with a wise friend, supervisor or mentor. Hold back the names (except with your supervisor), but do not hold back talking about the impact of the disclosure on you.
- It's not your job to make a case against the abuser – you don't even need to know all the details. The responsibility to prove allegations rests with the government ministry and the police. Your job is to represent the heart of God which stands for the abused and shelters the victim.
- The misuse of power and breach of trust that are part of abuse have far-reaching consequences that come from carrying the toxic stress of feeling unsafe.
- Disclosing abuse within the family throws a family system into chaos. When teens fear this they may avoid disclosing the truth. Help them realize that they are the child and they do not need to carry responsibility for what *may* happen any more than they are responsible for what *has* happened. Holding back the truth is more unsafe for the family than the short term chaos that may result from telling the truth.



RECOGNIZE

- Child abuse is any form of physical, emotional, verbal and/or sexual mistreatment or lack of care that causes injury or emotional damage to a child or youth.
- Abuse doesn't have to mean physical contact. It's also withholding things that the child needs (food, clothes, shelter), exposing the child/youth to sexual materials or family violence, or tearing down the child's self esteem.
- Become aware of what to look for because signs of abuse are varied. Watch for a collection of signs such as: unexplained bruises of different colours, over-sexualization of behaviour, flinching and fearfulness around heightened emotion, hyper-responsibility for siblings, excessive self-deprecating, or fear of going home.
- Abuse isn't always obvious. Follow your gut and check out your concerns. Abuse happens far more than we realize. 3 out of 10 children experienced physical and sexual abuse before the age of 15. Fewer than 1 in 10 disclosed.



RESPOND

When hearing a report of abuse:

- **Stay calm.** Look them in the eyes, sit close, listen with gentle attention.
- **Don't push for all the informational details.** Simply invite them to tell you about what has happened/is happening and how it is impacting them.
- **Ask who else they have shared this with.** Track the process. If this information has not been brought to the authorities already you will need to make a report (see below). BUT FIRST – care for the young person in front of you with respect and gentleness.
- **Do not agree to keep this between the two of you.** You cannot and will not stand by and let harm go unaddressed. Let them know that they don't have to carry this burden by themselves any more.
- **Expect varied responses.** After a disclosure, you may see anger, relief, minimizing, panic, backtracking. Reassure them that they are no longer in this alone. Tell them that you recognize that something has been taken from them and your heart breaks for their loss.
- **Prepare them.** After a report of abuse, Child Welfare workers choose the response that will bring safety in the way that is least disruptive to the youth if possible. Offering support to families is the first choice of response rather than removing youth from their home.

- **Don't forget the parents.** If the abuse is within the family, resist the urge to avoid and instead, step toward parents with support as soon as it is appropriate and to whatever level they will allow. Most parents don't want to harm their children but are unable to manage what is going on in their lives.

Abused children suffer at the hands of those they should be able to trust most. Rebuilding trust and processing the meaning of the losses can take many years. Be sure to connect the young person to a competent counsellor that they feel comfortable with to guide them in walking through this life altering offence.



RESOURCES

cwrp.ca/provincial-and-territorial-assistance - This resource will connect you with the numbers you need to call in Canada and the process you need to follow after a youth has disclosed abuse to you.

freedomforcaptives.com/devotions - A set of compassionate online devotionals for those who have suffered abuse.

www.protectchildren.ca/en - A wealth of information about abuse and online exploitation including a number of online training videos. Click to access their free 23 minute foundational video on **Safeguarding Children from Sexual Abuse**.



ABUSE

lifeteams
resources